

Canada

by Randa Bishop

Quebec should stay a part of Canada," says David Simard, 11, of Quebec City. David lives in the province of Quebec, where most people speak French. Most of the rest of Canada is English-speaking. Canada is a country with two major cultures, trying to live as one nation.

David's native language is French, and he speaks only a little English. He and his classmates were visiting the Cartier-Brébeuf (*kahr-TYAY-bray-BUF*) Park in Quebec City. They went there to learn about early explorers—especially those who discovered Canada.

Jacques Cartier, a French explorer, sailed up the St. Lawrence River in 1535, reaching the sites of what are now Montréal and Quebec City. The French later established a colony called New France, and ruled it for 150 years.

French rule ended after British forces defeated the French at the Battle of Québec in 1759. The 1763 Treaty of Paris transferred almost all of France's territory in North America to Great Britain.

A Separate Nation?

The British allowed the French to keep their own language and culture. But under British rule, the English language and culture came to dominate business and government in

most of Canada. This continued even after Canada gained independence from Britain in 1867.

The French-speaking people of Quebec have long felt dominated by the English-speaking majority in the rest of Canada. They want to preserve their French language and way of life. Some believe that Quebec should become a separate nation.

The people of Quebec have voted twice on whether the province should become independent. Both times, voters defeated the proposal by a narrow margin, most recently in 1995.

Last November, people in Canada watched nervously as Quebec voters went to the polls again. This time, they were electing a provincial government. The winner was the Parti Québécois (*Par-tee kay-BEK-kwah*), which wants independence for Quebec. The PQ has ruled Quebec since 1994 and has called for another vote on independence. However, its margin of victory was so close that most people do not expect a new vote right away.

Mixed Feelings

How do English-speaking Canadians feel about Quebec becoming a separate nation? Students visiting Quebec City from a small town in

the English-speaking province of Ontario had mixed feelings about it.

"We learn about it [separation] in school," said Jessica Foran, 12. "But if they want to separate, I don't really care."

Her friend, Brianna Gifford, 13, feels that if Quebec were to become independent, crossing borders would become a problem. "Quebec needs the rest of Canada," she said.

And the rest of Canada needs Quebec, too, said other students.



PHOTOS BY RANDA BISHOP

“Hardly anyone speaks French in my hometown.”

— Jessica Foran



Daniel Lachance



Dominique Lachance

“In Canada, it is important to speak both languages.”

—Dominique Lachance

What would happen to the small, poorer provinces to the east, such as Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick? Would these provinces be cut off from the rest of Canada, and perhaps have to look to the U.S. for [economic] support?

“We are visiting Quebec City to learn more about Canada and to practice speaking French,” Jessica explained. “I learn French in school, but I am not very good at it. A lot of people speak French in Quebec, but hardly anyone speaks French in my hometown of Petersboro, Ontario.”

Language Cops

Quebec's government has taken steps to make sure that the French language and way of life survive. One of the most important steps is Law 101, which makes French the only official language of Quebec.

Under this law, children who have

French parents must go to French public schools. So must children of immigrants.

That law also requires that signs be in French. Stop signs in Quebec use the French word, ARRET. Ironically, stop signs in France use the English STOP, because the word is recognized by people around the world.

The law makes exceptions for trade names, such as McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts. Other signs must be in French, and the government hires “language cops” to make sure that people obey the law.

French Canadians have long been concerned that their culture was in danger. In the early 1900s, church leaders in Quebec urged people to have large families, to increase their share of Canada's population. This phenomenon was called the “revenge of the cradle.” Today, French Canadians make up

one fourth of Canada's 30 million population.

In the major cities of Quebec, at least 20 percent of the people speak English. But in Quebec's smaller towns, up to 100 percent of the population speaks French.

Ice Canoeing

One of those towns is Montmagny, where Daniel Lachance, 15, and his brother, Dominique, 11, live. “I attend a French school and all my courses are in French,” Daniel explained. “English is the most important language in the world, the business language. But I also like my language. French is my culture.”

Daniel's brother, Dominique, also recognizes the importance of English. “I want to learn English so I can speak to more people. In Canada, it is important to speak both languages.”

The Lachance family is doing its part to preserve tradition. The father, François, is an ice-canoe champion. “My grandfather had to use an ice canoe to cross the river in the winter. Today, ice-canoe races are part of the Quebec Winter Carnival,” François explained.

And the Future?

What will the future hold for Canada? Most Canadians want to see their country stay united. As one man, now a grandfather, asked, “Why should Quebec separate from Canada? Look at Europe. It has many different countries, each with its own language. Yet they are uniting—they are even going to have the same currency, the euro.”

Pierre Trudeau, a former prime minister of Canada, once compared Canada to a mosaic—a work of art made of many different pieces. Dominique, Daniel, Brianna, Jessica, and David are part of that mosaic.

They all are Canadians. At the same time, they are proud of their own heritages. As David called out, as he grinned and ran off to join his classmates, “Don't forget, my name is pronounced dah-VEED.”

Word Match

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|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. province | a. independence |
| 2. site | b. legacy |
| 3. separation | c. like a state |
| 4. revenge | d. location |
| 5. heritage | e. getting even |

